

*Government Orders*

I do have a question. On our side of the House and in our caucus we have asked the minister of Indian affairs, we have asked the Prime Minister and we have asked many influential members on the government side to provide us with a definition of aboriginal self-government. I heard the hon. member for Churchill speak about aboriginal self-government today. It is very difficult for us to fulfil our role as an opposition until we have the terms of aboriginal self-government defined for us so we can determine whether they are good and just and will make us a better country and will enhance the role of aboriginal people within the nation, whether it may be divisive and negative on the country. I plead with the hon. member for Churchill. Would he at least be so considerate as to give us his definition of what aboriginal self-government is.

• (1700)

**Mr. Harper (Churchill):** Mr. Speaker, self-government simply put is to administer our own affairs, to be able to make our own decisions and to determine our own future. It is a very simple statement but very complicated to implement. Self-government entails many things. It means to start developing our own institutions, language, culture, education and our own First Nations government structures.

In negotiations self-government is based upon what kind of agreement is reached. My position has always been that the fundamental basis and foundation from which we negotiate are the treaties. When the first governments met we sat down together and came up with a treaty. That formed a basis for our relationship with the government. In return we were to have certain benefits.

However we have never extinguished the right to self-government. It has never been surrendered. To me the treaty making process has never come to an end. What needs to happen is the government needs to sit down with the First Nations in this country.

One of the reasons the constitutional process failed is that the very question the hon. member asked was raised at the constitutional table. All the first ministers and the Prime Minister asked the same question. They were the ones really to say what kind of structure we have. It was not based on equality. We were not being invited as equals; we were just invitees at the first ministers conferences. It failed because we were not equal in the negotiations.

Sometimes we get invited equally on a level playing field. However often when we are on that level playing field or let us say we are in a skating arena we find we have no ice skates or equipment, yet we play according to their rules. That is the kind of process we have been involved in. We are not being treated equally.

It should be based on the treaties, nation to nation. Once that is recognized instead of trying to determine what is best for us, we should sit down as equals, equal to First Nations. I think that would resolve a lot of the questions.

Self-government is not something which is defined in a paper. It has to be negotiated with the First Nations. It may vary from the Micmacs to the Haida people because they have different cultures and a different way of doing things.

There is the potlatch system. Potlatch is a system of government. We have the clan system which is another traditional form of government. There is Iroquois confederacy. These different systems of government have been here for a long time, whether they will be modified or not. Those are things we go through.

When the hon. member asks for a definition of self-government, it is a matter defining it in the negotiation process or through a treaty process. It is not black and white but it is a process that hopefully the governments are going to be undertaking so we can resolve it.

**Mr. Jim Silye (Calgary Centre):** Mr. Speaker, we are competing with each other to be recognized by you.

First of all I would like to congratulate the member for his speech today and the straightforwardness with which he expresses his point of view.

• (1705)

I for one am in this House to help resolve this problem. I definitely would like to see as much consultation and work as possible with the aboriginal peoples, the Indians, the Metis and the Inuit so we can resolve these long term outstanding settlements and agreements.

I know the settler people are here. I know the white man took over, those immigrants when they first landed. Perhaps the hon. member for Churchill would appreciate the current 1 per cent rule the Liberal government has and he would have maintained control.

Repetition is important; it is a fact of life. If he has to give a similar speech again and if he has to repeat it five or six times, I would encourage him to do that.

There have been a lot of wrongs committed. A lot of injustices to the native peoples have been perpetrated over the years. We in this House are not the ones who have perpetrated this crime nor made these mistakes. We are here to learn from these mistakes and we are here to try to make it better.

It is in this light and in this vein I wish to address the hon. member and let him know that what we are concerned about is the consultative process. Will he agree with us or put forward the next time he speaks the type of self-government the native people or the aboriginal people want will comply with the current law? He has his problems with the other tribes and other